

50—THE LAST PLAGUE AND THE PASSOVER

(Exodus 11–12)

Egypt lay in ruin from the plagues that Jehovah had sent upon the land by the hands of Moses and Aaron in response to Pharaoh's hard heart. But Israel was still in bondage. It seemed as if Pharaoh's hard heart would never relent and he would never let Israel go, in spite of Jehovah's promise. But Jehovah spoke again to Moses saying, "I will bring yet one more plague upon this land. After this plague, Pharaoh will not only let Israel go to worship me, he will request that you never return."

Jehovah continued: "Because of what I will do, this month will become the beginning of months for my people. From this time forward, this will be the first month of the year. Now, however, you must listen carefully and have the people do exactly as I tell you. On the tenth day of this month, every man who stands at the head of a family shall take a male lamb or male goat of the first year, one without blemish or spot, set it aside and maintain it until the fourteenth day—one animal to a house. But if a family is too small to eat a lamb, that family shall join with another.

"On the fourteenth day, each family shall kill its lamb in the evening and save its blood in a basin. Then they shall take a bunch of hyssop,¹⁴ dip the hyssop in the lamb's blood, and strike it upon the two sideposts and on the lintel, or upper post, of the door to the house where the lamb will be eaten. They shall then roast the lamb with fire and eat its flesh that night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. It is to be roasted with its head, legs, and edible inner parts and no bones shall be broken. All of the meat must be eaten that night in that same house, and if any remains in the morning, it shall be burned. They must eat the lamb in haste, with their girdles about their loins, their shoes upon their feet, and their staves in their hands, for this is Jehovah's Passover."

Jehovah's instructions continued: "On that same night I will pass through the land of Egypt to destroy all firstborn of both man and beast,¹⁵ executing judgment

against all the gods of Egypt. The blood on your doorposts will be a token to me of where the children of Israel are, and wherever I see the blood of the lamb, I will pass over that house and not destroy its firstborn.

"This day of Passover will be a memorial for Israel forever. It shall be kept as a feast to Jehovah at this same time each year throughout the generations. Seven days of unleavened bread shall be kept. On the first day all leaven shall be removed from your houses; and anyone who eats leavened bread during those seven days shall be cut off from Israel. There shall be a holy meeting on the first day and another on the seventh, and no work shall be done on those days, except to prepare food. Israel shall observe this feast forever in remembrance of this day on which I brought them as an army out of Egypt."

When Moses and Aaron received these instructions from Jehovah, they called the elders of Israel together and told them concerning the killing, roasting, and eating of the lamb. They explained how the blood should be struck on the doorposts and the importance of not leaving the house until morning. "For," said they, "Jehovah will pass through Egypt to smite the Egyptians; but when he sees the blood upon a doorpost, he will not suffer the destroyer to come into that house." And the people of Israel went and did as Moses and Aaron commanded them.

The plagues had taken a mighty toll. Moses was now well known throughout Egypt, and all the people now listened when he spoke. And Moses said to the people of Egypt (for Jehovah had so instructed him), "Jehovah will go through the midst of this land on the fourteenth day about midnight and all the firstborn of Egypt will die—from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the maidservant behind the mill. The firstborn of your beasts will die also. There will be a great cry throughout Egypt, such as there has never been before or shall ever be again. But against the children of Israel there shall not even a dog move his tongue. And by this you may know how Jehovah puts a difference between the Egyptians and the children of Israel. Then shall the people of Egypt bow before me and say, 'Please leave our land—both you and your people.' And after this we will go out."

¹⁴ The plant that was called hyssop in the Bible is not known. Some believe that it was marjoram, while others believe that caper is more likely (see William Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible, Gospelink*, CD-ROM, s.v. "hyssop").

¹⁵ The KJV scriptural passage reads firstborn, but it not conclusive from the Hebrew word involved whether this included all firstborn, both male and female, or if it was limited to firstborn males only. A persuasive

argument can be made for the latter. The Hebrew word *bkowr* (*behk-OR*), which was used here, has been translated both ways. Related scriptures, such as those in which Jehovah said that the firstborn males belonged to him following the preservation of the firstborn of Israel (e.g., Exodus 13:12), provide some evidence that it may have been only the firstborn males that were slain.

And so it came to pass, at midnight on the fourteenth day of the first month, Jehovah smote all the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, that they died. And Pharaoh rose up in the night—he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians. There was great weeping in Egypt that night, for the tragedy of death fell on every Egyptian house.

Pharaoh, in the agony of his soul, called Moses and Aaron to him in the night and said, “Rise up and get out of Egypt, both you and your people. Go and serve your God as you have said, and take also your flocks and your herds. Begone from Egypt, and do not return.”

The Egyptians were eager to have the Israelites out of their land. “Go now,” they said, “or we shall all be dead!”

As Israel prepared to depart, Jehovah spoke again to Moses. “Tell the women of Israel to borrow jewels of silver and gold from their Egyptian neighbors,” he said. And thus Jehovah fulfilled his earlier promise,¹⁶ giving the Israelites favor with the Egyptians that they gave them their jewels as well as other things needed for their sojourn in the wilderness.

¹⁶ This promise is given in story “46—I Have Seen the Afflictions of My People.”